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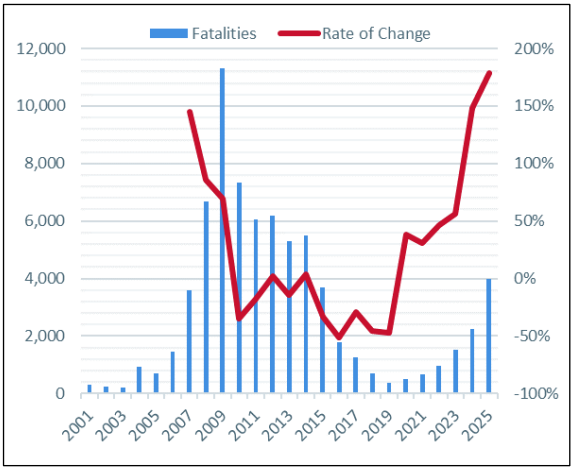
Terrorist and Other Militant Groups in Pakistan

U.S. officials have identified Pakistan as a base of operations and/or target for numerous armed, nonstate militant groups, some of which have existed since the 1980s. Notable terrorist and other groups operating in and/or launching attacks on Pakistan are of five broad, but not exclusive types: (1) globally oriented; (2) Afghanistan-oriented; (3) India- and Kashmir-oriented; (4) domestically oriented; and (5) sectarian (anti-Shia). Twelve of the 15 groups listed below are designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) under U.S. law and most, but not all, are animated by Islamist extremist ideology.

Pakistan has suffered considerably from domestic terrorism since 2003, and related fatalities peaked in 2009. Many observers predicted a resurgence of regional terrorism and militancy in the wake of the Afghan Taliban's 2021 takeover, and data show this has occurred: After five consecutive years of declining fatality rates down to 365 in 2019, the number of terrorism-related deaths in Pakistan is up every year since, spiking to 4,001 in 2025, the highest toll in 11 years (see **Figure 1**). By many accounts, Pakistan currently is the country most impacted by terrorism.

Figure 1. Terrorism-Related Fatalities in Pakistan and Rate of Change over Time, 2001-2025



Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (New Delhi).

According to the U.S. State Department's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2023* (the most recent, released in late 2024), "Pakistan took some steps to curtail the activities of terrorist groups" in 2023. It also reported that some madrassas (religious schools) "taught doctrines that could lead to greater acceptance of violent extremist ideology."

Although major cities such as Islamabad and Lahore have been targeted, the great majority of terrorism-related fatalities in 2025 were concentrated in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP, 68%) and Balochistan provinces (28%), especially near the border with Afghanistan (see **Figure 2**). A 2014 National Action Plan to counter terrorism seeks to ensure that no armed militias are allowed to function in the country. Islamabad accuses neighboring India of actively supporting terrorist and militant groups operating in KP and Baluchistan, charges India denies. Several major military offensives, including airstrikes, and hundreds of thousands of "intelligence-based operations" have failed to defeat the numerous U.S.- and United Nations-designated terrorist groups that continue to operate on Pakistani soil.

Figure 2. Map of Pakistan

Sources: CRS. Boundaries from U.S. Department of State and ESRI.

In 2018, the Paris-based intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) returned Pakistan to its "gray list" of countries found to have "strategic deficiencies" in countering money laundering and terrorist financing. In late 2022, FATF assessed that Pakistan had addressed technical deficiencies and completed all action items, and it removed the country from the gray list. Also in 2018, the U.S. President designated Pakistan a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. It has been redesignated annually since.

Globally Oriented Militants

Al Qaeda (AQ) "core" was founded in 1988 in Pakistan by Osama bin Laden and designated as an FTO in 1999. U.S.-led forces expelled AQ from Afghanistan after its September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. AQ subsequently operated primarily from the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA, now incorporated into KP; see **Figure 2**). U.S. special forces killed Bin Laden in a 2011 raid in Pakistan; he was succeeded by Ayman al-Zawahiri, himself killed by a U.S.-launched airstrike on Afghanistan in 2022. A successor has yet to be named. AQ core has been seriously degraded, but has alliances with numerous other Pakistan-based FTOs.

Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) was established in 2014 under the leadership of Asim Umar, an Indian national subsequently killed in a joint U.S.-Afghan military operation. It was designated as an FTO in 2016. Based in Afghanistan and with an estimated 200 or fewer members, AQIS has been implicated in terrorist attacks in Pakistan, including a 2014 attempt to hijack a Pakistan Navy frigate.

Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP or IS-K) is a regional affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, ISIL, or the Arabic acronym *Da'esh*) that made inroads in Afghanistan in 2015 and was designated as an FTO in 2016. Its estimated 4,000-6,000 fighters are mostly former members of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan who are based in Afghanistan but also operate in Pakistan, along with disaffected Afghan Taliban fighters.

Afghanistan-Oriented Militants

The Afghan Taliban emerged in southeastern Afghanistan in the early 1990s, ruled most of that country from 1996-2001, and were named as Specially Designated Global Terrorists in 2002. Long led by Mullah Omar (who died in 2013) and now led by Haibatullah Akhundzada, during the period 2001 to 2021 its leadership was believed to operate mainly from the Balochistan provincial capital of Quetta, as well as in Karachi and Peshawar. It gained strength as U.S. force levels in Afghanistan decreased significantly after 2014, and retook power in Afghanistan in August 2021.

The Haqqani Network (HQN) was founded in the late 1980s by Jalaluddin Haqqani and designated as an FTO in 2012. Jalaluddin retreated to Pakistan after 2001 and his son Sirajuddin later became the group's leader. Sirajuddin Haqqani also became a deputy chief of the Afghan Taliban in 2015 and Afghanistan's acting interior minister in 2021. HQN reportedly has several hundred core members and an estimated 3,000-5,000 armed militants with varying degrees of affiliation, many of whom reportedly operate near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and have undertaken numerous kidnappings and attacks in Afghanistan. Some U.S. officials have linked HQN to Pakistan's main intelligence service, a charge Pakistan denies.

India- and Kashmir-Oriented Militants

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) was formed in the late 1980s in Pakistan and designated as an FTO in 2001. Led by now-incarcerated Hafiz Saeed and based in Pakistan's Punjab province and in Pakistan-administered (Azad) Kashmir, it has changed its name to Jamaat-ud-Dawa to circumvent sanctions. With several thousand fighters, LET was responsible for the mass-scale 2008 terrorist assault on Mumbai, India, as well as several other high-profile attacks.

Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) was founded in 2000 by Kashmiri militant leader Masood Azhar and designated as an FTO in 2001. Along with LET, it was responsible for a 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, among numerous others. Based in both Punjab and in Azad Kashmir, JEM's roughly 500 armed supporters operate in India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan while seeking annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan. JEM has openly declared war on the United States.

Harakat-ul Jihad Islami (HUJI) was formed in 1980 in Afghanistan to fight the Soviet army. After 1989, HUJI redirected its efforts toward India, although it did supply fighters to the Afghan Taliban, and it was designated as an FTO in 2010. With an unknown strength, HUJI operates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, and seeks annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan.

Harakat ul-Mujahidin (HUM) was designated as an FTO in 1997 and operates mainly from Azad Kashmir and from some Pakistani cities. It was responsible for the 1999 hijacking of an Indian airliner that led to the release from an Indian prison of JEM's future founder; most HUM cadres subsequently defected to that group.

Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) was formed in 1989—reportedly as the militant wing of Pakistan's largest Islamist political party—and designated as an FTO in 2017. It is one of the largest and oldest militant groups operating in Indian-administered Kashmir. HM's cadre of up to 1,500 is composed primarily of ethnic Kashmiris who seek independence for Kashmir or annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan.

Domestically Oriented Militants

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed in 2007 and designated as an FTO in 2010. It is widely regarded as the deadliest terrorist group operating in Pakistan and has undertaken numerous mass-casualty attacks on Pakistani security forces and their families. TTP is composed largely of ethnic Pashtun militants who unified under the leadership of now-deceased Baitullah Mehsud, then based in the former FATA, with representatives from each of Pakistan's seven former tribal agencies. TTP leadership reportedly fled into the border areas of eastern Afghanistan in response to Pakistani military operations in 2014. Resurgent since 2021, led by Noor Wali Mehsud, and with ties to Al Qaeda, the TTP's estimated 2,500-5,000 cadre seek to defeat Pakistan's government and establish Sharia law in KP. Pakistan government officials accuse the Afghan Taliban of providing safe haven for the TTP.

Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA, aka the Majeed Brigade), was founded in 2000 and designated as an FTO in 2025. An ethnic-based separatist group of several thousand armed militants, the group employs guerrilla warfare tactics, including those targeting People's Republic of China (PRC) nationals and PRC-funded investment projects in Balochistan.

Jaysh al-Adl (aka Jundallah), designated as an FTO in 2010, is an ethnic Baloch separatist group operating in and from Pakistan's Balochistan province, oriented primarily toward Iran and its ethnic Baloch regions.

Sectarian (Anti-Shia) Militants

Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP, aka Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat) is an anti-Shia group established in Punjab in the mid-1980s. It has been dormant since 2012.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LEJ) is an SSP offshoot designated as an FTO in 2003. With membership in the low hundreds, LEJ operates mainly in the former FATA, Punjab, Balochistan, and Karachi, as well as in Afghanistan. It reportedly has close ties with both Al Qaeda and the TTP.

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